

I don't like psychiatrists but I've thought about going to them about this but I know what they are finally going to tell me: that what I think it is, it is, but I don't think it's anything, you see, and that's what makes it all so strange.

all the women I've lived with have the same answer: "you're just a fool," they say.

THE PAYOFF

it's down by a track near the border and it's called THE PAYOFF HOTEL and it's directly north of the track perched on a cliff and after the races you can look down at the empty track and see the stables and now and then a horse and always those stacks of hay.

there are hundreds of rooms, all taken, each room with a shower and black and white tv, next to the lobby is a dance floor where some of the players try to dance and romance the few young girls to the loud music of a small band playing thirty year old melodies.

the players drink beer and cheap wine, their shirttails hanging out, their pants too short, their shoes scuffed and down at the heels.

walking through the halls at night, many of the doors are open and in each room sit one or two men reading RACING FORMS and drinking beer and wine, and in the morning by the pool before the races some of them will be dressed in vari-colored trunks, more like wimps than pimps, and they'll each have a copy of THE DAILY RACING FORM.

there aren't any steady winners at THE PAYOFF HOTEL, how they exist is unknown; they are durable and transitory and all the rooms are always taken.

I'll see you there next summer and I won't be able to tell you from them and you'll look like me and I'll look like you and we won't look very good, waiting for the action.

THE CATS' BEHINDS

your niece came and left
and your mother came and left
I outlived their problems
next I will rip up the cornstalks
in the garden,
maybe we can burn them in the fire-
place, ears and all, I have never
burned ears, have you?

the old folks next door are gone.
are they dead or visiting in
Kansas? when they die, you know
who's next? everybody. the
cats too, the cats' behinds.

death or no, it's still nice to
live in the same place for two or
three years, no landlord banging.
one can get drunk and break the
windows, puke anywhere; one can
sing, scream, roll down the
stairway; one can step out on the
balcony and see all the way to
Long Beach.

it's all very literary.

the movie people come by, the
interviewers, the translators, the
editors, the publishers, the
suckerfish; we get them all drunk,
we get much drunker than they and
we talk for hours, smoking our cigars,
eating their pills, smoking their
stuff, we talk into the sunrise,
into the morning, pouring more drinks, coming out
of the kitchen with ever-new bottles, pulling out
the corks; I am two or three times their age; they
nod sleepily, they don't want to hear any more,
they wanted to hear about creation, how it's done;
I never talk about that, it doesn't interest me, it
doesn't mean anything, only talking about playing
the horses means something, you see, it all evolves
around the horses, that's the secret, you want the
secret? that's the secret

"oh, ?, oh, yes, is ... that it?"

they leave.

I wear them down. I make them hate. I give them
more than they want. they want to suck blood,
I give them puss. they leave.

they want to know where they can get stuff published,
some of them want to know that. and if you suggest a
place, they send their work with a note: "Chinaski
suggested that I send this to you"

it's all very literary.

if I, with this minor fame, am gutted with them, what
does Norman Mailer do?

anyhow, here the refrigerator works and
the toilet flushes and no Hundus prowls.

the best way to forget the past is to live in the present as if we deserved it, though we worry about the luck, and also the shell-shock and the brain-damage of a deranged past "children, have you read Alex Comfort, Christopher Morly and Conrad Aiken?"

anyhow, no landlord banging here now
one cat asleep in the car, another half-asleep
stuffed with horsemeat on top of the tv set
and the third out front being fractional with
the possums who live in the front hedge.

my tax accountant phoned today and said not to worry, he'd write the people at the Frankfurt place and tell them that under the Double Taxation Convention with the USA that I had already sacrificed the runner to second.

where was this guy when I was trying to sleep on that park bench in El Paso during that 1941 sandstorm? while half the world was burning?

it's 2:15 a.m. and you aren't drinking, I've drunk almost all of it and there are only two bottles of beer left.

you are downstairs watching a space program on tv and I won \$147 at the track today, clean lines zinging here, only one landlord knocks now -- that moldy parasite, he'll collect

here where the succotash is fine and murder episodes flower upon our tv.
I'll sleep soon after drinking those two bottles of beer ...

I've finished writing this
it's very literary.

GIFT

you know
the man in back moved out
couldn't get his rent
so I inherited this
huge old cat
big as an average dog
mean
yellow eyes
old and furiously strong
when he strikes with one of those
paws
the walls shake.
his name is "Butch" and he
doesn't play around
he's cranky